

My lungs cold and dry, the air had run thin. I couldn't feel the tips of my fingers or toes anymore. I could hear thuds above but all seemed irrelevant in the scheme of things.

I try to remember happier times, but all I see is a blinding orange. In Eastern philosophy, the color orange symbolizes alertness and impatience. Maybe it's a warning not to look further. The furthest I can remember before it happened was two months ago. I can remember small and insignificant details of my life. I lived in a town filled with flower fields that meandered by the ocean. I remember being bored and lonely. Maybe that's how this nightmare began.

The white sun wakes me up as if it was looking directly at me. I look to either side of me—overgrown shaggy grass surrounds me. I put my hands behind me to hoist myself into a seated criss-cross position. I look around taking a moment to gather my thoughts. I recognize this place. My friends and I used to play games here as children. Kids these days come to the same place to drink and smoke. You can't blame them though in a town this small. What else is there to do? I walk the trail out of the forest into the city, if you could even call it that. There are multiple groups of homes about three or four houses next to each other. We called them cul-de-sacs but that term should be used lightly. They were all suburban track homes made by a company hoping this would be the new San Diego. I walk along the paved streets till I get to a dirt path. I walk about a mile on this dirt path when I get to a shack. The shack was small and made of wood. It was on the edge of an eroding cliff and the wood had begun to rot.

The woman who I recall so vividly was a hoarder. Around the house were all sorts of shiny things streams of tinfoil were hanging from every surface. As I walk closer to the house, I see a mirror. It seemed I had forgotten what I looked like. I was tall about "5,9 I have brown overgrown hair with a white stripe. My eyes were hazel glowing in the sun, my lips full, and freckles scattered along my nose and cheeks. I walk up the final stair to the door of the house. I turn the doorknob and when I am about to push open the door I feel a pull. Now standing in front of me is the woman who I remember—not my real mother but the closest I have to one. Her hair was light brown with a hint of orange, her eyes a classic brown, skin a velvety tan. She was beautiful and no one could understand why she didn't move out of our town. She looks deep into my soul and hugs me. No words and no tears. I didn't understand how but she knew, she

somehow could tell the pain I've been through. Was she psychic? No this was just the bond between mother and child.

Julia sat me down in the living room. The walls were lined with an array of colorful old books. I was sitting on what looked like a Victorian couch. There was a Tiffany stained glass lamp next to me casting a sweet homey orange onto the room. The smell was as you would expect of an old house with old books. I could hear the tea kettle scream and Julia scurry to pour the tea. She sets the ornate tea set on the table with biscuits and treats scattered on colorful china plates. She sets a blanket on my lap and gives me a cup of warm herbal tea before sitting down in the chair across from me. She begins to speak.

"What do you remember from that day, Kai?" I gave her a funny look.

"What day, Mom?"

"The day you left of course."

Instead of denying it, I started to think about what I might remember from that day. Why has my mind run blank? Why can't I remember what is clearly mine? And then a wave of emotion hit me. I recalled the feelings before the memories, then they hit me.

"You've been gone for two weeks. The first week I thought you were just being a boy running off with all your little friends. Then I started to get worried. The second week I called the police. They said it happens all the time." She was speaking in a sad and worried tone.

I started to speak, my voice trembling "I-t -I It was Friday, May 24th, 2024. I was walking to get some food after school. I was walking with Fifi. We weren't very close but we felt the same way about this town. After we got something to eat I walked her back to her home and we said our goodbyes. When I noticed that it was starting to get dark I decided to take a detour home. I decided to walk along the cliff so I could listen to the ocean. It was beautiful, a misty gray marine layer in the air and when the moon reflected off it cast an enchanting blue. Soon the wind started to pick up and so did the waves. The sound of the waves hitting the rocks made my head pound. I stand still for a moment and look around. I was at the edge of the flower fields standing at the cliff's edge and suddenly the mist of a wave hit me. I jump

back but start to fall forward. It is dark and I keep falling through a long portal until I land on a thin and hard mattress.

I looked around me and there were no windows. The room I was in was made of old creaky wood. I jump up and shuffle to the silhouette of a door. I open the door and see a blinding sunny day. I am standing at what seemed to be the top of the cliff but things looked different. The cliffs are taller and steeper. There are dirt pads and machinery. There are tall stacks of tin buildings with smoke coming out of them on the horizon. I retreated back to the house because the air was much colder here. My hands were shaking. On the chair in the room, I see mining gear—overalls, long sleeved shirt, boots, handkerchief, goggles and a construction hat. I put it all on and I feel out of place.

I walk along the dirt road towards the smokestacks in the distance. My body is still stiff from the cold. I was walking for what seemed like miles until I reached a busy group of miners that were dressed like me. They had thick accents I could barely understand. It was English, but it sounded like what I imagine Vikings sounded like. I join their group and walk with them. We were heading to a place called Dolcoath. The men were excited because it had recently reopened and offered a higher daily wage. When we reached the mining site, a woman was handing out pasties and water. Pasties were a puff pastry shaped in a triangle that was filled with potato, cheese and onion. They were used to keep the miners' hands warm when deep in the mines.

A large man wearing a white beaded shirt with black coal stains was hustling all the miners in carts to go down in the shaft. He had a sloppy thick accent that made me jump when he called my name. He signaled for me to come over. He told me to supervise “this lot.” I must have been their leader by the way he spoke to me. The group that was headed down with me were talking about how they wanted to go to the brothel after this shift. They invited me but I declined. We stopped at an alcove that was about the size of a living room and had a beam made of pine in the center of the room. It was starting to bend, I could tell it wasn't right from the look of things. I took a mental note of the beam. I told the men with me to fan out and start mining. The sounds of their pickaxes reverberated throughout the space. By the end of the day we had filled up twelve carts full of tin and were ready to go back up. When I got back up the same man was

there, he greeted me and threw some coins in my hand. I told him that the plank in the middle of the room was starting to bend. This was odd as the ceiling was made of solid rock. The man said they would put a few more supports down there the following day. He told us to all go home and rest up before the big day tomorrow. I go home and rest knowing something isn't right. The following day I arrived at the site, sixteen men were waiting for me. The first group goes down with me and the second follows closely. We were carrying five logs of strong pine. As we got down the earth started shaking. The second group felt the shaking and went back up taking the only minecart back up. Suddenly the ground above us started to cave in. At first it just crumbled then bigger debris and soon the whole roof had caved in, I ran to a part of the cave that has a natural alcove. I could barely breathe. The dust was so thick, I tried to use my handkerchief but even that didn't help. I tried to call out to see if anyone was down here

“HELP!”

“HELP!”

It was silent for twelve hours, not a peep, no rocks shifting or falling, just an empty silence. By the thirteenth hour, the air had run thin. The box that I was trapped in was small, not tiny though maybe six feet by four feet. The room was freezing and slick with a wet slime made by the humidity mixed with the mud. It's been fourteen hours. I no longer hurt my body's numbness. I know the pains are still there. The carbon monoxide is just masking it. My lungs heavy and dry I make one last attempt for salvation.

“HELP ME PLEASE!”

I hear a thud but it's too late my head falls back

*Was my life worthless? I didn't save anyone or change their life I was just a burden with no purpose.* I open my eyes to a blinding light shadowed by a cloudy gray. I was saved only me and one other man I was laying in a cot my body was so cold. A woman comes in from what sounded like a door

“You's a lucky chap aye”

I couldn't help it anymore I start to cry the woman was clearly taken aback by the fact that a man was crying right in front of her. She comes closer to the bed I turn to look at her, I lay still it was Julia it was

mom i get up and begin to runforward to her. Suddenly the same portal that stole me from my home before appeared right under my feet I fell threw screaming for my mom.

“Oh baby im so sorry,” Julia says to me bringing me back to reality

“I missed you so much, mom.”